

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal  
CONDUCTED BY  
**CHARLES DICKENS**

No. 908. NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, APRIL 24, 1886.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

## A STERN CHASE.

A STORY IN THREE PARTS.

By MRS. CASHEL HOEY.

### THE THIRD PART.

#### CHAPTER XL. LIGHT AT EVENTIDE.

THE sun shone brightly on the marriage-day of Julian and Dolores, and all the omens were good. Nobody wore green, nobody was moved to tears by the ceremony. The wedding was a pretty one, and although it was a very small and simple affair in comparison with the sumptuous nuptial celebrations which she had witnessed on her own side of the Atlantic, Effie Wharton was delighted with it. Lillias had given her whole mind to making the grand occasion all that it ought to be—an unchequered recollection of brightness for Hugh's daughter to look back upon all her life. Dolores had four bridesmaids, Effie Wharton being one of them. Colonel and Mrs. Courtland came up from Lisle, where they had passed the few weeks of Julian's engagement, and whither they were to return on the day after the wedding, accompanied by Lillias. The Whartons were going to Scotland, Rodney to make his unreasonably-deferred visit to his place at Southampton. Colonel Courtland had invited him to come to Lisle so soon as he had had enough of his proprietorial solitude, and Rodney had accepted the proposal with alacrity. He frankly acknowledged his conviction that he was destined to make a conspicuous failure in the character of a country gentleman.

The wedding-day was, therefore, one of general break-up, and Lillias was glad of this. She was sending Hugh's daughter away from her to be as happy, she truly believed, as was consistent with the lot of humanity; nevertheless parting was

parting. The time of which Mrs. Courtland had warned her was come; the time when she must stand aside, a spectator only of the fate and fortunes of her beloved charge. She was glad that she would have to accustom herself to this, at a distance from the familiar surroundings; there was a change in herself too, and the knowledge made her restless. Her love and pride were fully gratified by the bright beauty and the beaming happiness of Dolores upon her wedding-day. Never had that name seemed less appropriate to the bearer of it. No fairer bride than Dolores had ever knelt at the altar rail, to

Lay aside her maiden gladness for a name and for a ring,

as the desponding poet of a sentimental epoch sings, and no better behaved bridegroom than Julian had ever played his comparatively unimportant part at a wedding.

The carriage was in readiness to convey the happy couple the first stage on their life's journey, and the bridesmaids, having given the last touches to her travelling dress, left Dolores alone with Lillias. The snow-white wedding-dress, and the superb white lace mantilla, Rodney's gift; which Dolores—who also wore her pearl-mounted comb—had substituted for the ordinary wreath and veil of an English bride; lay on a sofa, and all around was the pretty, luxurious disarray of the occasion. Smiling at the reflection of their two faces in the glass, Dolores said:

"Now give me my rosary, Aunt Lillias, and put it round my neck yourself. Mr. Rodney told me yesterday how he recognised my mother from my father's description of her when he first saw her, by the rosary of coral and gold; so it is a kind of relic of both of them, and the only one I have."

Lillias put the rosary round the girl's

neck, concealing it with the lace at the top of her gown, and clasped her close in an embrace that might have been a mother's in its fervour.

"Tell me again," she said, "that you have been quite happy with me."

Dolores, still held in her arms, looked seriously into her face, her bright eyes veiled with sudden tears, as she replied:

"Aunt Liliás, I don't believe there was ever in the world anybody so happy as I have been with you."

The wedding guests dispersed in due time after the departure of the bride and bridegroom. The Whartons were the last to go, and cordial farewells were exchanged between them and Liliás, with anticipations of a pleasant meeting in the winter. The house was left to the peculiar blank that follows a wedding, and Liliás to the equally inevitable sense of being unable to settle down to her ordinary occupations. Colonel Courtland had gone out on horseback; his wife had retired to her sitting-room; Rodney, who was staying at The Quinces, had also disappeared. Liliás changed her wedding finery for a walking-dress and set out for the Heath. It was growing late in the afternoon, the sun would soon be setting; she would have just the one hour that she liked best in which to think, amid a favourite scene, of the events of the day, and the new life that had opened for her.

She bent her steps to her chosen spot, the little ridge upon the Heath below the road, from which the widest prospect was to be commanded; she sat down in her accustomed place, but she could not give her thoughts the orderly direction she had intended. They persisted in taking another course, and she was obliged to let them have their way; a profitless way she knew, but she could not help that. And so she gave herself up to them, promising herself that it should be for the last time, and was tasting to the full their bitter-sweet, when a quick step upon the solitary road above her caught her ear. It was not a thing to note, for such sounds were of course common; but this was a step she knew. In another minute Rodney was standing by her side. She was absurdly unable to address him in the matter-of-course fashion that befitted the occasion, for the simple reason that it was of him she had been thinking, and she rose hurriedly, with some embarrassed remark about the lateness of the hour.

"Are you going home?" he asked, with

evident disappointment. "I fancied I might find you in this direction, and that the postponement of dinner would give us time to see the sunset."

She resumed her seat without a word, and he placed himself on the grass a little below her; but he did not pay any attention to the sun, although the clouds of glory were beginning to muster for the grand "good-night." He leaned upon his elbow and looked at her.

"The wedding went off very well," said Liliás, "and our young people seemed very happy." She knew she was making a stupid remark, and that it was also superfluous, for she had said those very words to Rodney five minutes after Julian and Dolores went away; but she could not think of anything else to say.

"We agreed upon both those points a couple of hours ago," said Rodney, with the slow smile to which she had grown used, "and I don't propose to talk about our young people. They have been talked of, and thought of, quite as much as is good for them or for us, and I now mean to change the subject."

She still watched the muster of the clouds of glory, and he still looked at her.

"To-morrow will see our pleasant companionship broken up, as to-day has seen the old order of things in your home pass away for ever. Before that happens I want to tell you a story."

"A story?"

"Yes. A love story. It is not an uncommon one, and I shall tell it briefly. It is my own story. When I was a very young man, and quite ridiculously poor, I fell in love with—an angel. That, you know, is what we generally do when we are young, and especially when we are poor. She was, however, an angel who lived upon this solid earth, and she had a mother, who cannot, I think, have ever been an angel. But this mother was a wise woman, and, when I had won her daughter's heart, or at any rate, her promise, she offered no violent opposition to our engagement, but put her trust in absence and time. My calling was one that took me away to far distances for long periods; we had no idea of an immediate marriage; my angel and I parted with all the usual protestations, and I am sure the purest intention of everlasting constancy. I got a valuable commission—of course I was to save largely—and I started for the ends of the earth in high hope and profound grief."

She was looking at him now, and her sensitive face was all alight with interest.

"My journeys were difficult, the means of communicating with me were uncertain. I heard from my angel but rarely; after some time I ceased to hear from her at all; and when at the end of ten months, I again reached civilised regions and found a bundle of letters awaiting me, the first I opened informed me that the young lady—who ceased to be an angel as I glanced over the first lines of her mother's jubilant epistle—had married very well indeed, and hoped to hear that I had done, or was about to do, likewise. It cut me up at the time to an extent which I should be ashamed to acknowledge to any one but you, and it did me a great deal of harm. Such experiences always do harm men, I think, just as unkindness to children injures their natures. At all events, it made me a savage for a long time, and a cynic, or so I believed, for good and all."

"Were you a savage or a cynic when Hugh knew you in Cuba?"

"I had got over the first stage by that time; but I was cynical enough, and if I had not been moved by considerations for him of a more serious kind than what he might suffer about Ines de Rodas, I should have left him to his disappointment in that respect with but faint compunction."

"Should you? That would have been hard surely."

"To you with your earnestness, unselfishness, and constancy, it would seem so of course; but I should not have blamed myself; for I did not then believe in love, except as a young man's fancy, of which he is much better balked in nine cases out of ten."

"Hugh would never have got over it," said Liliás, with the sincerest conviction; "and he might have been harmed as much as you were. I would rather think of his fate as it was, with all its sadness, than that he should have had so much to suffer."

"I have been sure ever since I have known you," said Rodney, "that you are one of those rare women who hold the old faith which has so few votaries now—the faith that love is everything, that love is enough. I have seen that faith manifested in your life, which has no self in it, and I have wondered whether you had learned any lesson of disappointment, such as I was taught, bearing no fruit of bitterness, but only that of peace and charity and all the graces of womanhood, in you."

Her colour rose, her heart beat fast at these strange words. She took them as a question, and she knew not how to answer it. He paused for a moment; but she did not speak.

"I will go on with my love story," he continued. "You think it has been told, but that is not so. I was a very young man at the time when wisdom was so amply justified of one of her children, in the person of the mother of my angel, and I took a long, long leave of love of the illusory sort. The years that have put my youth far behind me have taught me a deep lesson. The woman whom I love I reverence; the wife whom I humbly aspire to win is the ideal of all my later, better, more instructed life. That is my love story. Liliás, what do you say to it?"

With these words he rose to his feet and stood before her with outstretched hands. But she did not speak.

"Liliás," he repeated, "what do you say to it? It is as true a story as ever was told. Is there any chance for me? Is there any hope that in my evening there shall be light?"

She looked up at him; but her eyes fell hastily before the deep, calm, masterful gaze of his. Then she said, very low, but distinctly:

"I never had a love story in my life—until now."

The clouds of glory were all radiant in crimson, and purple, and gold; the sun had gone down in awful majesty, saluted by the evensong of birds; the evening shadows were falling; as Liliás and Rodney walked home together through a world transformed to both. She said but little; he had so much to say. He had to tell her how the charm of her unworldliness had appealed to one who had seen so much of the opposite; how the lofty simplicity and disinterestedness of her mind had first surprised and then delighted him; with what lively curiosity and interest he had studied her conduct to Dolores, and contemplated the steadfast constancy with which she cherished the memory of the dead and the associations of the past. Of all that he had noticed in her of unlikeness to the rest of the world, the latter had struck him most as being least in accordance with his ordinary experience, and with the fashion and custom of these latter days. The old-world "piety" of Liliás had a wonderful charm for him in his

middle age; but perhaps he would not have denied that in his youth, at the period of the angel, he might have scoffed at it. He had to tell her, too, how altogether lovely she was to him in her dignified, self-possessed womanhood, with her clear eyes, her smooth, thoughtful brow, her grave, sweet smile, and that air of perfect purity in thought, word, and deed which was always around her. All this and much more he had to say to her, with many words of love, and some pleasant sketches of their days to come, for whose speedy beginning he pleaded in his own whimsical way, in the double character of a true lover and an elderly man. Liliás heard it all, amazed at her own good fortune and supreme happiness, half doubting whether it could be true, because it made so very much of her—and her humble rating of herself was all unfeigned—yet trusting it wholly because it was said by him. There was something of awe in her mind when she re-entered, as the affianced of the only man she had ever loved, the house which she had so recently left with the sense that her life had come to a standstill, and that its vitality and beauty had gone out of her home. How much of that feeling had been due to the love that she had not dared to acknowledge to herself, until the owner of her heart had claimed it, Liliás did not ask.

The postponed dinner was a pleasant repast. There was an unaccustomed shyness about the manner of Liliás, Colonel Courtland thought: and this Rodney noticed too, and appreciated, as so true a lover should. They were soon left to themselves, for Mrs. Courtland had excused herself from coming down to dinner on the plea of fatigue, and the Colonel joined her when Rodney sought Liliás in the drawing-room.

It was natural that they should talk of Dolores; and it pleased Rodney to draw Liliás on to telling him of what her own care and solicitude for the girl had been, of her faithful fulfilment of Hugh Rosslyn's trust, and also of the closing years of his father's life. She was wholly unconscious of the testimony that she was bearing to herself, and of the profound admiration and respect with which her simple matter-of-course narration was inspiring him. But he soon made her understand both, as he protested that henceforth it should be his pride to surround her with the love and care that she had hitherto lavished upon others.

It was late when these old-fashioned lovers parted, but much later when Liliás closed her eyes, after this day of wonder and delight, in perfect happiness, and slept with such a smile upon her face as had not touched it since Hugh was lost.

Mrs. Courtland was not only very tired on the evening of Dolores's wedding-day, but she was unaccountably out of spirits. She tried to rouse herself when the Colonel came upstairs, but it was not to be done, and he found her particularly disinclined to talk about the wedding. There was no great improvement in her spirits on the following day, and the good Colonel, who genuinely regarded all his fears and troubles with respect to Julian as ended, now that he had the best girl in all the world for a wife to make a delightful home for him, and keep him safe in it from the temptation of bad company—the Colonel was always down on Julian's supposed tempters—felt himself decidedly snubbed. Things would be pleasanter, he hoped, when they got back to Lisle.

Rodney took leave of Liliás and her friends early on the day after the wedding, and left town for Southampton the same evening. Colonel and Mrs. Courtland and Liliás started at noon for Lisle. The Colonel's hopes were realised; things were much better when Mrs. Courtland found herself at home again; but this was only because she had come to a wise resolution that she would keep to herself the matter which was troubling her. Nothing could be changed; the wrong that had been done was irredeemable.

Now the matter that was troubling Mrs. Courtland was the following:

Late in the afternoon of Dolores's wedding-day the post brought Mrs. Courtland a foreign letter, which had been forwarded to her from Lisle. The writer was Madame Isambard, who had retired to Florence, and the contents consisted of the story of Julian Courtland's conduct to Margaret Denzil, who was staying with her. "She has come to me, as I desired her to do if ever she was in trouble," wrote Madame Isambard, "and she did not know, neither does she now know, that I am acquainted with you. I tell you this pitiful history—not to harm the young man, though he might be the better for some sound punishment, and not to help Margaret, for nothing can help her but time and her own good sense. Both these will act soon, I trust, the former in the natural course, the latter by showing her



that she was in love with a creation of her own fancy, not with Julian Courtland. I tell it to you in the hope that the other poor girl may be saved; you will know best whether that can be done, and, if it can, how to do it. I know how deep an interest you have always taken in her. Margaret Denzil has seen her, and tells me she has grown up a lovely creature."

The fears, suspicions, and forebodings of Mrs. Courtland were fulfilled. But the "other poor girl" could not be saved; and the best thing to be done, for the sake of all concerned, was to keep silence herself, and to entreat Madame Isambard to do the same.

Colonel and Mrs. Courtland learned the good news which Lillas told them, after the arrival of a letter from Rodney gave her a ready opportunity of speaking of him, with unqualified pleasure. They were not so much surprised as she expected. Mrs. Courtland had observed the impression that Lillas made upon Rodney; and as she was not prepared to accept her friend's own humble estimate of her powers of pleasing, it had occurred to her more than once that a marriage might be the result of their strange meeting. She was, however, too wise to drop a hint of such a thing to Lillas, who would immediately have been placed at a disadvantage by her embarrassment. The pleasure with which she heard the news had, too, a strong element of relief in it. The evil to come could not be averted; it was in the inevitable sequence, in the fitness of things, but it might be made to wear a less terrible aspect to Lillas, with Henry Rodney to support and console her when it came. The Colonel, in whose thoughts there was no complexity, rejoiced with simple gladness, declaring that he had never met a finer or a better fellow than Rodney, and that, if any man could be worthy of Lillas, Rodney was that man. So, amid the heartfelt congratulations of her friends, and with her heart filled with deep gratitude, true love of a quality as uncommon as her own nature, and exquisite measureless content, Lillas began the visit to Lisle, which was to be brightened by constant letters from Rodney, with his presence in prospect, and by the news of her dear Dolores. She was wonderfully happy. Sometimes she caught sight of her own face in a glass, and could hardly believe it was hers, so soft, smiling, and youthful was it. Just before he said good-bye to her, Lillas had asked Rodney

whether he did not think Hugh would have been pleased, and Rodney had answered: "I think, my love, we may change the tense, and assure each other that he is pleased."

Dolores sent short but charming letters home. She was delighted with "abroad," as she called foreign lands generally; she liked the hotels, the people, the streets, the shops, the churches, the dogs, and the food. She was sure Aunt Lillas would be shocked at her extravagance when she should see the heap of lovely things she had bought everywhere; but it was Julian's fault, he thought she ought to have everything she wished for. They had seen such beautiful places. Dolores was sure "abroad" had improved greatly since she and Aunt Lillas were there, although that was so short a time ago, and she should like to stay for ever, only that "at home" was going to be so delightful too. Julian's name appeared in almost every sentence, and when it did not, it was because Dolores mentioned him as "my husband" instead.

A fortnight passed. The weather was beautiful. Lillas and her friends almost lived out of doors. Rodney sent charming accounts of the nice little estate which he had once called "that confounded place of mine at Southampton." Now he considered that it only needed the rule and governance of Lillas to be an ideal home.

It was situated within a short distance of Southampton Water, and commanded the prospect that is said to have suggested to Dr. Watts the image of the spiritual Canaan.

Rodney sketched the place, and marked where

Sweet fields, beyond the swelling flood,  
Stand drest in living green,—

sent her flowers and fruit from the gardens, and proposed that the whole party, having seen the young pair off from Southampton on their voyage to the West Indies, should afterwards make an inspection of the lucky legacy that had brought him to England.

By the same post which brought this pleasant proposal, Colonel Courtland received a letter from Julian, with the latest information about the plans and movements of the happy pair. They proposed to reach Paris by the middle of the coming week, and had bespoken rooms at the Grand Hôtel Universel. Dolores was quite well, but slightly inconvenienced by the loss of her maid. She intended to engage a substitute in Paris.

Below Julian's signature was written :

"A LINE FOR AUNT LILIAS.

"No one in the world was ever so happy as Dolores Rosslyn, except

"DOLORES COURTLAND."

"A testimonial to character," observed the Colonel, as he carefully tore off the lower half of the sheet on which these words were written, and handed it across the breakfast-table to Lilies. "Yours, Julian's, and her own."

On the following Monday at noon, Lilies received a telegram from Rodney, despatched from the railway station at Southampton. The message was in these words:

"I have made an important discovery, relating to events of interest to you which took place here, and I am coming up to town to-day. Expect me at Lisle by the first train to-morrow."

#### FADING FLOWERS.

THERE is nothing stranger among the facts of biology—it used to be called Natural History—than the very partial distribution of plants. Take the Galapagos Islands; almost every separate islet has to some extent what is called its own flora, i.e. some species which are not found in any of the others or on the American continent. In the lonely islands of the Atlantic this was far more noticeable; for there the distinctive forms were not merely new species, allied to, though different from, those found elsewhere, but plants the like of which were not to be seen in any other part of the world. Of these the most are hopelessly lost, thanks to the goats and rabbits left on the islands by old navigators. Some, like the dragon-tree of Teneriffe, have been just saved in time. Man has interfered, and has fenced round one or two as samples of what used to be a staple product of the island; though probably man might have fenced in vain were not the dragon-tree by no means so palatable as the primeval woods which used to clothe Ascension and New Amsterdam so richly, as to make scholars who landed there remember what they had read about Circe's Isle.

Man will have to interfere in Oceania, too, if the flowers about which we read in the old legends, and of which chiefs and common people alike used to make their garlands, are to be prevented from going the way of the dodo. There every island

group has, of course, its own plants; and no wonder, for almost every island group is as far from any other group as Norway is from Timbuctoo; ay, many of the islands which form the separate groups, and on the map look pretty close together, are really scarce nearer than London and Vienna. The wonder here is, not that the "floras" differ so widely, but that some plants are found over almost the whole Pacific. How can this have come about? Is it that, as some have fancied, these island groups are the mountain-peaks of a submerged continent? Or are ocean currents answerable for such a wide dispersion of plants; and are those which are found everywhere of such as have strong seed-cases, able to resist the action of salt water? However it comes to pass, some plants are in the Pacific as ubiquitous as the nettle is in Europe; others are confined to a very few places, or even to one, like that lovely flower which Miss Gordon Cumming tells us is only found among the volcanic débris close to the crater of Mouna Loa, in the Sandwich Isles. And it is these plants which are in danger of extinction; many are disappearing year by year, so that, when Mrs. Francis Sinclair has stated the number "of flowering species in the Hawaiian Isles at four hundred," she at once corrects herself, and says: "But probably there are far fewer now, for this enumeration was made some years ago." What a good thing it is that she took in hand to paint them—such beauties many of them are! I hope some one out of the many London ladies who can paint flowers will copy her pictures, and hang them up in one of the Kew houses, perhaps in the vestibule to Miss North's gallery of tropical trees and flowers, so that those of the public who cannot afford to buy Mrs. Sinclair's costly book, may have a chance of learning what the plants are like which the white man is killing out as surely as he is killing out the brown man who delighted in them.

How sad that even about that delight one has to use the past tense! Everybody testifies that no race on earth had such a love of natural beauty, showing itself in a fondness for flowers, and a skill in using them for decorations, as this brown race. And everybody is astonished at their strange loss of heart in these latter days. They seem to know they are going, and not to want to stay. Why? May it not be due to the way in which "civilisation" has come among them? First came the

whaler, English and American. He seemed to be a god with his death-dealing fire-tubes, his ships with great white wings, his iron—such a wonder to people who knew no metal. He was drunken often, and diseased as well. But then, their own gods had human passions; and, therefore, low-lived brute though he was, the great gods might have chosen to visit them in that form. Next came the missionaries, and showed them a better way. And they, too, were as gods, great in knowledge and in wisdom. But they hated flowers and dances, and everything that put brightness into life. "Dance now, wear flower garlands now, and you'll burn everlastingly," said the holy man in black. "Let your women wear poke-bonnets and your men shirts and trousers, and worship inside blank white walls, and then you may hope for safety." What an alternative! Either the mad orgies of the sailors—a whole island drunk for a week, as was too often the case when a ship brought in a cargo of spirits—or the depressing dullness of the teachers. One hopes that the Bishop of Honolulu and the Roman Catholics in Wallis Islands and elsewhere are at last showing the brown race that beauty and true religion can go together, and that God may be worshipped with flowers and art-decorations quite as faithfully as in the bare ugliness of an old-fashioned chapel. In the Roman Catholic religious colonies—for their plan is to form their people into communities apart—the population is actually increasing.

Why don't the Roman Catholics try to keep plants as well as people from dying out? And why should not Hawaii, which has its Constitution and its Houses of Parliament, and everything that a civilised community ought to have, set up also a botanic garden, a Pacific Kew, in which the plants that are disappearing may be kept alive till better times?

I think the Catholics are right in isolating their converts. To teach a Kanaka and then send him back to his tribe, is simply to give him new powers for mischief. He will throw off his clothes, kill somebody to prove his mettle, and use the skill that you have developed in him in circumventing his neighbours. I am speaking of the wilder islands which are still in the tribal state. The Hawaii group has passed out of that; the Samoan is passing out of it, the process being helped or hindered—it seems very doubtful which—by the rival consuls of England, America, and Germany, in

whose hands the King is a mere puppet. Tribes are always at war with one another, till one has so thoroughly got the upper hand as to make all resistance hopeless; and the labour-traffic keeps up this state of constant war. Prisoners are sold to the "black-birders," whom the High Commissioner seems more powerless to check than were the captains of cruisers in the days when they could act independently. Payment is always in muskets, powder being a sort of small change; and wars are therefore far more exterminating than they were when men had no weapon but a club. From the New Hebrides come the best workers, and there the drain has been so severe that no more men are forthcoming. The Chinese are filling up the gap left by the dying out of the Kanakas; already in the Gilbert Isles all the trade is in the hands of a house rejoicing in the name of Ong-Chang. The "black-birding" (sometimes helped by using a sham missionary as a decoy) is mostly kept up by Queensland planters. They must have "hands." Chinese cost too much. Coolies the Indian Government will not give them, except under restrictions which they think vexatious. So they go in for islanders of all kinds, who are nobody's subjects, and therefore unprotected, except by the farce of an agent who shuts his eyes to all the tricks that go on in order to secure a shipload. It is slavery over again, with "browns" in the place of "blacks," and is fast killing out the population in the islands to which no whaler ever went, and which missionaries have not yet taken in hand. Planting needs "hands"; "hands" must be paid for in guns; guns kill faster than clubs—that is how the system works.

And the planter, too, is mainly answerable for the disappearance of the flowers as well as of the human population. On the big German farms in the Islands, for instance, are grown cotton, and oranges, and cocoanuts, etc., for which the ground has to be broken up and the "weeds" got rid of. And, besides, on every plantation there is a quantity of "stock," and these, wandering high and low, nibble off the shrubs which, growing in poor soil on rough ground, would be pretty safe to escape spade and plough. That is why so many plants are dying out; they never had to stand against such enemies before. Like the New Zealand birds, which had not learned to hide their nests, because Maori boys never thought of taking the eggs, the plants in these islands have been for ages

growing in an easy, careless style, and cannot all at once develop the cautious ways of an English weed, whose life has so long been a struggle against man and beast. What with tillage and forest fires, and, above all, the ravages of animals, Mrs. Sinclair says you may travel for miles in the Sandwich Islands without finding a single native plant. They were all trampled in, or eaten off, or burnt down; and, before they could recover, the ground was taken up by some foreign weed which had come in with the cotton or other seeds.

With plants, as with men, it is the survival of the hardiest. The nettle, for instance, has so long had to run the gauntlet that it will last while the world stands. See what a root it has come to have; you never can get all of it out, no matter how thoroughly you break up your ground. But neither the delicate kokio-keokeo (*Hibiscus Arnottianus*), which is the subject of so many songs and legends, and which, with its white petals and rich pink stamens, used to drape the sides of rocky ravines, nor the red variety with which girls used to adorn their hair, ever had any struggle for existence till the goats came, who have made them both very nearly things of the past. We have lost plants in England, who can tell how many? The "lady's slipper," daintiest of our orchids, is almost extinct. Perhaps in one of the lovely dales of West Riding, in a sunny spot where thick woods all round keep the air damp, you may find it; but I never did. I have seen it in a garden near Pen-y-gant, and of course it is in the orchid-house at Kew. Then another fine orchid, the great white helleborine, used to grow on Bathwick Hill, near Bath, but building and high farming (that foe to botany) have improved it off. I dare say the draining of Whittlesea Mere lost us some plants, as it certainly lost us the big copper and perhaps the swallow-tailed butterfly. It is not every plant that you can treat as you can corn-bottle and poppy, which grow anywhere and stand any amount of ill-usage. A poppy, by the way, the puakala, (*Argemone mexicana*), is the only Hawaiian plant that has really got a firm foothold. Captain Cook noticed its snowy blossoms; and its leaves and stems have covered themselves with rough hairs as if to resist the beasts which he first introduced into the islands. Moreover, its seed has the same wonderful vitality as that of white clover. When ground is cleared by a fire, the puakala is sure to come up, though it

had not been seen on the spot for thirty or forty years. As its name shows, the puakala is also found in America; but this is not so wonderful as the fact that the ohia lehua (*Metrosideros*), a dark evergreen with scarlet blossoms—which, as shrub and tree, is so universally present in Hawaii that in song and legend it takes the place which the heather does in Scotland—grows also in New Zealand, a quarter of the world's circumference away. So, by the way, does that gaudy creeper, the iele (*Freydenetia*), which in Hawaii is being killed out by rats, who gnaw off its succulent bracts.

The kou, too, the most useful of the Hawaiian woods, soft and yet durable, and of a beautiful brown, is found in some islands south of the line, though not in New Zealand. This tree (*Cordia*) is being killed out; but if there is any wisdom in the Hawaiians they will surely take measures to preserve it. Unhappily their old handicrafts are also dying out. Nobody nowadays makes a kou-wood bowl or dish. He buys an ugly, imported stoneware one; and so the skill which came out in the old home manufactures will soon be lost past recovery. It is very fine to be able to sing hymns which one does not understand, and know the names of the twelve apostles and the minor prophets; but to be able to make a bowl of kou-wood, or build a canoe, making the outrigger of the cork-like wood of the wiliwili (*Erythrina*), whose scarlet blossoms were used for decking hair, and its still brighter scarlet beans for garlands, or to catch birds with a view to feather cloaks, or even to compound herb medicines, is better still. And all this the natives have forgotten. The chiefs don't wear feather cloaks; on grand occasions they put on dress-coats, and look very awkward in them. The sick have given up trusting to simples, and take patent medicines which play the mischief with their unaccustomed stomachs. They are forgetting their folk-lore, in which flowers played such a conspicuous part; they are even (says Mrs. Sinclair) forgetting the names of the commonest plants, as well as the stories connected with them.

I hope that Mrs. Sinclair will fill another volume or two; and that what she is doing for Hawaii some one else will do for Tonga, and so on. What better occupation for a missionary's wife? What more graceful work, too, for the girls' schools? These brown maidens, with whom the love of flowers is a passion, would surely



be apt scholars in sketching and colouring them.

Thanks to chromo-lithography, what is done in this way can be reproduced at small cost for the delight of the English working-man. Of old, a book like Mrs. Sinclair's would have been a precious thing for a King or an art-patronising noble; now there is no reason why every free library should not possess it, and, displaying it on a convenient easel, let designers of all kinds come to it for lessons in form and colouring. What can be more graceful, more helpful in art-decoration, than the *Ipomæas*, of which Mrs. Sinclair figures six kinds? These beat all the rest in form, glorified *Convolvulus*es as they are; and the *Hibiscus*es (mallow tribe, to which also belongs the indigenous wild cotton) in colour. And, then, the *ohai* (*Sesbania*) and other plants of the pea tribe. Fancy our Tufted Vetch transformed from a slender creeper into a big shrub, and its lilac blossoms quintupled in size and turned to the brightest coral; that is the *ohai*—nearly extinct, alas! so popular is it with cattle. Over and over again, in Mrs. Sinclair, one reads "like most Hawaiian plants, it has feeble roots and is therefore soon destroyed." Whereas our buttercup, not content with being absolutely uneatable, and producing any amount of seed, has in one or two of its species developed a creeping root which runs along like couch-grass. That is the way to last; be so unpleasant that nothing will touch you, and continually keep strengthening your hold on your surroundings. If, like the *poolanui* (*Coreopsis*) you are a useful fodder plant, there is no hope for you; you will be eaten down till you disappear, and then people will wonder what makes the forest look so sombre that used to look so cheery in spring when it was lighted up with your gay blossoms. Even the *ae-ae* (*Lycium sandwicense*), which thrives on the edge of salt lagoons, and gets on without rain, sucking up through the sand the brackish water, is in danger of being exterminated, for during droughts cattle are only too glad to browse on its thick juicy leaves. I said the *kou* was dying out; so, too, is the *kouili* (*Alphitonia*), a fine, large, hard-wood tree, which the natives used to like for house-posts because *kouili* posts would last a life-time.

One peculiarity of the Hawaiian flora is the number of shrubs which grow down at the water's edge. One expects

*convolvulus*—one of them creeps through the sand of our English coasts. One is not astonished to find a sort of *cistus* or substitute for a rose, with yellow blossoms and seed-pods, armed with stout thorns, the *nohu* (*Tribulus*); but it does not seem natural for a shrub just like a *daphne*, white flowers, green berries, shiny leaves, to be growing within the wash of the waves. Another peculiarity is the scarcity of eatable fruits. What there are, too, are disappointing; the *akala* (*Rubus hawaiensis*) looks like a very fine raspberry; but it is quite flavourless. Even that brilliant giant, the *ohia-ai* (*Eugenia*), whose blossoms, just like those of the *Pyrus japonica*, make it the glory of the Hawaiian woods, bears a wretchedly insipid pear. The natives used to live largely on this poor fare; they often suffered from famines, during which they were glad to cook even the very bitter tuber of the *hoi* (*Dioscorea*). Yet in those old days they did not dwindle away, as they do now that common food is plentiful and wholesome.

Another tree, the *ilihi* (*Santalum*), or sandal-wood, is almost extinct, not owing to ravages of cattle, but because it was so remorselessly cut down and sold (too often for rum) to skippers who carried it over to China and sold it at an immense profit. This again is one of the plants which are found from one end of the Pacific to the other, as is also the *aalii* (*Dodonæa*), of the hard wood of which Maoris as well as Hawaiians used to make spears and paddles. I hope the *ohenaupaka* (*Scaevola*), a sort of yellow honeysuckle, will not die out; for it is described as "living on the bleak, misty precipices, 5000 feet above the sea, wet with trade-wind clouds, and braving the gales which rush upward from the ravines." Another mountain plant is the *kolokolo-kuahiwi* (*Lysimachia Hillebrandi*), with dark blue flowers, delicately scented. The name means that, if it is plucked, heaven will shed tears. Hence the natives were careful never to gather it when on a march, for they dreaded the cold rain as much as coolies do during the monsoon. Alas! nowadays very few natives have ever seen it; they stay at home instead of roaming freely over the hills. Above all things they eschew the windward side, where—like the *Edelweiss* in the less-frequented Alps—many plants still thrive which have been quite killed out on the drier and more frequented lee-side of the mountain ranges. They have even given up most of their old games. No one now thinks of making a

swing of nukuiwi (Strongylodon); it is "improper" to swing. I wonder "the authorities" have not set their faces against the displays of fireworks with which every visitor is so delighted. These take place on the north side of Kauai, where the cliffs rise sheer out of the water to a height of nearly 2000 feet. On a moonless night the spectators put to sea in their canoes, and the "pyrotechnist" walks up the cliff with a bundle of dry papala sticks (Charpentiera) with their feathery blossoms. He lights one and flings it down, and the wind, which blows up the face of the cliff, catches it and whirls it about. Then he launches another and another; and soon there is a grand display of stars careering madly about, until, when the wind drops, they glide down gracefully into the sea.

The Hawaiians must regret their disappearing plants; they must, with their keen sense of beauty, see that a pasture sown with artificial grasses is a poor exchange for a natural meadow with its grass all festooned with the beautiful blue convolvulus. They must be thankful that the akaakaawa (Begonias) by the waterfalls are not likely to die out; and that the simple little nohuanu (*Geranium cuneatum*), so like an English field-flower, is not likely to become extinct because its home is in the bleak upland swamps, 4000 feet above the sea, out of the reach of cattle, and seldom visited by man. Well; the world will be distinctly poorer when the brown race and the flowers which were its loved companions disappear from Hawaii. There will always be Germans enough in the world, and they are not in general a very interesting people; and there will always be as much cotton and sugar in the world as the world wants. Does not it seem a pity that, after his Anglo-Saxon brothers have set the brown man's feet so firmly on the downward path that there seems no chance of his pulling up again, the German should complete the work of destruction by killing out the native plants for the sake of a little more cotton and sugar?

#### THE MIRACLE OF ERBREZZO.

THE English race has ever been considered the most gregarious race of all, but those tourists who have travelled much in Italy return to England fully convinced that in the love of wandering to and fro the Italians beat us hollow. The question with them is not, as with us, "Where shall we go to?" but "Where shall we hurry

from?" The first case is terrible from hesitation and uncertainty; the second is quickly answered, and resolves itself into the simple response, "From whatever place we may happen to be in at the moment." Now that place is never "home," for the modern Italian knows it not, and half Italy is always on a visit to the other half, which second half hurries to return the visit as soon as possible. Even strangers seem bitten by this strange mania of locomotion, and you may witness the flight of whole bands of foreigners rushing from one place to the other without any apparent motive than that of changing locations with their friends and fellow-countrymen.

During my stay last year at Verona, whither I had hastened to fly from Milan, leaving my comfortable quarters in that city to an English family flying from Verona, I was seized with the same kind of vertigo which falls upon all Italy at certain times, for I had scarcely arrived in the place before I could fully understand this Southern mania of flight. It differs entirely from the yearning we Englishmen experience for the free sea-breezes or the fresh country air. It is no yearning for that which we have not; it is simply a disgust for that which we have.

Now in my own case the attack came on after four-and-twenty hours' sojourn in Verona. I had seen most of the sights in that time, and could behold the rest in my mind's eye with sufficient clearness to be convinced that they were not worth beholding otherwise. And now the dreaded weariness came over me with redoubled violence from the mere circumstance of witnessing from my window, on the second morning of my stay, the streams of people all hurrying by, in one direction, on foot, on horseback, rushing to the Porta Vescovo, which leads out into the Val Pantena. Whither were these people hurrying? Not to any festival or fair certainly, for all were clad in sober garments and every countenance wore a grave and solemn expression. "They are evidently not on pleasure bent," thought I; "they must be flying from something in Verona." First the panic of revolution, so common to English travellers on the Continent, then the panic of contagion, seized upon me, and I descended to the street to make enquiries. The water-carrier, to whom I addressed myself, pitied me from the bottom of his soul; nay, he almost shed tears to think that any human being

should be so utterly devoid of education, of religion, of general knowledge as not to be aware that it is by the Porte Vescovo that people get into the Val Pantana, and by the Val Pantana to the holy village of Lugo, and that the holy village of Lugo is on the road to the still holier village of Erbrezzo, where the most wondrous miracles are being performed, and the most heavenly blessings vouchsafed to certain favoured individuals, by the Holy Virgin, who dispenses them, not through the intervention of Pope or priest, but in her own proper person.

Not a moment did I hesitate to take advantage of the information thus obtained, and immediately set about procuring a place in one of the numerous public conveyances at that moment leaving Verona every ten minutes, eager to behold with my own eyes what I had hitherto beheld through the visual organs of other people.

The vehicle was crowded. I was fortunate enough to be seated between two priests from Vendri, both of them men of education, but each one educated in a different school. Their opinions on the miracle of Erbrezzo differed entirely, and their arguments being enforced by Italian gesticulation, conveyed every sentiment but that of confidence and security to the listener. Opposite to me was seated a lady clad in the deepest habiliments of woe, who never ceased turning over between her fingers a rosary of huge box-wood beads, which rattled beneath her touch with sharp and sudden sound like that of cracking walnuts. Young maidens, too, were there, with eager, inquisitive eyes, and little girls, to whom the most important part is assigned at Erbrezzo, as the Holy Virgin had evinced from the commencement a decided preference for female children.

The more enlightened of the two priests, who had studied at Milan, discoursed lengthily on the classic souvenirs of the various places we passed through. He told us the antique origin of the crypt at Santa Maria delle Stelle, formerly dedicated to the "nervous goddess," as he delicately put it, wherein the priests and pythonesses performed the rites that induced the statue there enshrined to give answers to timid believers and exact offerings from them. "Idols," said he, "precious both in matter and form, have been found in many places in the neighbourhood; and every relic of antiquity tends to show that, although the

goddess had fled, it was not before she had developed in this part of the country a faith vivid enough to retain impressions of the superstitions of the dark ages, and carry it into the holy beliefs of our own true faith." The priest who had studied at Verona grew alarmed at the hint of doubt and incredulity in the miracle of Erbrezzo conveyed in this speech, and in his turn ventured upon establishing his own doctrine by side-winded hints in its favour, and, as we were drawing near to Lugo, took the opportunity of strengthening our minds for Erbrezzo by endeavouring to inspire belief from the example of Lugo. A most miserable place, by the way, is this said Lugo, lying in a deep and narrow valley, over which the sun at this season only passes hastily, never even in summer granting more than an hour or two of heat. The population are sallow-faced, dirty, and bigoted, with the enjoyment of a goodly tribe of crétins. The vine is stunted and dried up; rarely does its fruit ripen at Lugo. The harvest is meagre and insufficient for the wants of the inhabitants, who have no means of existence but that supplied by the sale of firewood, brought down from the hills, for the lime-burners.

By-and-by we drew near to Erbrezzo, and all were preparing by the emotion expectant for that about to be realised. The situation of Erbrezzo itself is peculiar, and well fitted to be the scene of supernatural visions. It lies in the Lessini hills, upon a perpendicular rock, and closes the Val Pantana towards the north. It is a village composed entirely of shepherds' huts. It possesses, however, the inestimable blessing of a mayor and other officials. It is surrounded by uncultivated meadows as far as eye can reach, and differs from the rest of this part of Italy in displaying neither vineyards, nor olive groves, nor mulberry plantations, nor corn-fields.

On arriving at about a mile distant from Lugo our vehicle stopped, and we were told that neither horse nor carriage could proceed further, and that the remainder of the journey must be performed either on mules or on foot. A terrible footpath alone leads up the rock. On the left is the bridge of Veja, and the celebrated grotto produced by the falling in of the lower rocks. To the west of Erbrezzo the extent of meadow-land seems boundless—dull brown withered grass parched dry, not by the sun but by the cruel mountain wind. All around is desolation; the land is marked out by heaps of stones embedded in the soil,

standing never less than a yard high. A few chestnut-trees, oaks, and beeches, may be seen scattered here and there, but whole groups of them never bear leaves. Two hamlets, Stafor and Regazzani, are just visible in the distance.

On one side is a very rapid elevation of soil. Its form is that of a semicircle. At its foot is the dried bed of a stream, and towards the top a slab of rock about a yard and a half in width overhangs a deep rent, not more than ten inches wide, but of immeasurable depth. It was in front of this—the miraculous rock—that there first burst upon our view the mighty concourse of people assembled to behold the Virgin Mary appear for a moment, then move away and float out into space. Thousands upon thousands believe that others see the vision, while themselves can only testify to beholding the snow, the rocks, the multitude, and the barren heath all around. For myself I must confess to an ardent desire of belief, and as I stood in the midst of the poor people murmuring their prayers while shivering with cold, I found no heart to laugh or scoff at the humble faith which had brought them thither.

The scene was indeed marvellous. An immense multitude bareheaded, kneeling on the frozen snow; the monotonous chant of the hymns; the wailing cries of supplication; the white peaks of the mountains, and in the distance the evergreen oaks of Chiesamonte throwing their sombre shadows over the snow; a pale but spotless azure sky; a splendid heatless sun; a biting bitter wind; and alas! the sharp pangs of hunger which it stirred, all combined to inspire a mixture of feelings which I could well imagine might in most cases turn to passionate devotion and entire belief in the miracle. By the rock had been built a shelter constructed of newly-cut logs. This is set aside for "the seers," and round it stand the mountain-priests, a strange set of men, who merit a description—with their threadbare cassocks and their goat-skin capes, their shining leather skull-caps, their shaggy locks falling low down over their shoulders, their perpetual snuff-taking, their greasiness and dirt. Presently one or other of these priests, turning to the multitude kneeling on the ice, shouts forth an exhortation to pray in honour of Mary, and instantly there bursts forth in an indescribably high pitch—a miracle in itself—a strange wild psalmody, without rhythm or measure or melody, but which from this very cause

seizes on the nervous system with an intensity of power indescribable. Here then will no doubt be discovered the secret of the music of the future. Every now and then the discord receives new impulse, becomes full of the shock of unexpected clamour. This is produced by the mingled voices of the thousands clambering up or sliding down the slope; and the women with red kerchiefs on their heads, men with their dark blue caps of the most singular shape, boys and youths bare-headed, and girls with plaited hair bound with coloured ribbons, form the wildest and most picturesque groups ever dreamed of in the most inspired visions of the painter. All sing the *Stabat Mater*, the *Ave Maria* *Salve Regina*, but each singer, male or female, in a different key. Now and then however the old "*Viva Maria e chi la creo*" would rise in shrill treble tones above the whole. All these hymns are supposed to be pleasant to the Madonna—the strains she invariably calls for.

I saw several thousand persons assembled on an inclined portion of the rock, difficult to climb at all seasons, but particularly dangerous now that the ice is incrusting on its sides. But faith permits all to walk easily across it, and very few fall. Only one poor Christian believer broke his skull in attempting to seize the Madonna by her cloak as she floated from peak to peak. Needless to say he seized nothing. However, people affirm that whilst kneeling in expectation of the appearance of the apparition they feel neither hunger nor cold, and that the frozen earth appears soft as down. The mountain-priests do not object to people standing, but as soon as one of them intones a chant all hats and caps must be laid aside. Some of the very old men are allowed to replace the hat by the grotesque parti-coloured kerchief. It seems to strike no one, however, that this must be a manifest sign that some amongst them must really feel the bitter cold. The multitudes from all parts of Italy, of various feelings, emotions, and souvenirs, fall all together upon their knees, and pray with a unity of purpose perfectly astonishing. I saw the pious believer imploring help as a reward for his faith, while the sinner at his side was crying out for pardon and mercy. I saw the stupid face upturned beside the intelligent physiognomy of its neighbour; the innocent child bending low beside the lately yielding convert to righteousness; the fresh young maiden and the toil-worn matron; the



half naked beggar, and the rich, warmly clad farmer; the critic too, whose incredulous smile dies away half-formed upon his lips, as he witnesses such a miserable exhibition of religious fanaticism and hysterical convulsion.

Whilst all eyes are thus directed towards the Holy Rock, suddenly a young girl is heard to exclaim in a shrill voice and with an accent that is really electrifying: "Here — here — is the Madonna!" and, breaking through the dense crowd, runs down the slope. Precipitating herself under the shed, her eyes staring wildly, she raises her trembling hands above her head, crying out, "Glory to Mary!" and the people answer devoutly, "Glory to Mary!" The priests standing round the shed now bid the seer to question the Madonna. This is done in a whisper and the girl tells the priest the answer, which she alone hears and understands, although it is given only by a sign of the head on the part of the apparition. Sometimes the seer communicates the answer in a loud tone to the multitude. Often has the cry, "I behold the Madonna!" burst forth simultaneously from five or six different tongues, and the seers have hurriedly crowded together to the shed where they related the request made by the vision to each one in particular. Now, the Madonna is said to demand an Ave Maria; anon the third part of a Rosary or any other prayer; and they instantly begin to sing it aloud. Meanwhile, the priests busy themselves in taking down the names of the happy mortals considered worthy of so great a miracle, and in preparing proofs of its authenticity. The more devout shed tears while they sing, and I own to having been almost won over to the tearful majority. Emotion is contagious, and the sight of big, hot tears rolling down the bronzed and careworn visage of a hard-working peasant, must always produce a gush of feeling difficult to repress.

Sometimes men and women of a certain age are deemed worthy of a manifestation; but generally the seers are girls under twelve years of age. At all events, those who see nothing are comforted with these words of the Madonna transmitted by the seer, "Happy are they who yet have faith although they see not."

The greatest favourite of the Madonna is a lame woman of Erbrezzo. She is twenty-four years of age; she sees daily. She has taken up her abode in the shed, and indicates to her companions the movements they are to make; she is, however, re-

garded as an exceptional being, and is looked upon as destined to fulfil a great mission.

All the time that I stood there gazing on the vast multitude, insensible to all things save the fancied presence of the Madonna, the endless stream of sinners and believers kept pouring in from Verona, from Prento, and even from progressive Milan, to implore grace and mercy. The roads resounded with an interminable litany, and the waste of time, money, and health can never have found a parallel save in the mad days of the Crusaders.

Although the season was not favourable for travelling in those regions, I could not resist the temptation of paying a visit to Chiesanuova, which lies at a short distance from Erbrezzo. Although still higher up in the mountains, the site is so beautiful and picturesque, that speculation has lately discovered it and has established several good inns in the place, one of which is conducted on the plan of the great Swiss hotels. Much prosperity is anticipated, as Chiesanuova has at last been noticed by a party of travelling English artists, and, its fame having been carried to Rome and Milan, a golden harvest is expected. The philosopher, as well as the artist, might find some interest at Chiesanuova, for the place resists all progress in idea, and still preserves in the church the inscriptions graven on marble in honour of its late foreign masters, with the addition of new ones in contempt of the National Government, which latter include the one from His Holiness, "Perduellione abupuit provincius."

Here, as a matter of course, I was favoured with new details concerning the miracle, and learned, what none could tell me at the Rock itself, the history of its origin, from these poor mountaineers, who daily defy the elements to climb the rugged heights, to adore what they do not see and what they can realise better by the sculptured column of their own piazza. Their information bade me believe that about the year 1850 two small children were gathering wild berries on the very spot of the present apparition, and, choosing the most unripe from a wild plum tree, were enjoying the feast to their hearts' content, when suddenly a fine and beautiful lady passing by enjoined them, with motherly solicitude, to abstain from eating the acid fruit. The poor babes would not listen to the friendly words, but continued to swallow the unwholesome treat. No sooner had they

returned home than they both fell ill, and died during the night ! But the Holy Virgin comforted their parents with the promise of taking them both with her into Paradise.

From that hour, until the year 1860, the Madonna appeared not again. The parents, who had heard the sweet promise, had told the secret to no one. But when the Holy Virgin returned from time to time to earth, sometimes with two lovely children at her side, the memory of this adventure was raked up and added a new charm to her visitations ; for did not these two poor children belong to Erbrezzo, and are they not buried there ?

Those who declare themselves seers do not number more than a hundred, and are mostly young children. The hysterical lame girl is the greatest seer of all, and is for ever addressing and saluting her advocate in heaven. It must also be observed that many are the methods of "seeing." Some behold the Madonna quite small, with a "bambino" which seems falling from her arms. Some behold her of matronly appearance, but all describe her dress as that of the Madonna in their own village church. The apparition usually stands upon the split rock, but does not disdain to walk about or float through the air. The Virgin does not speak, but nods or shakes her head in affirmation or denial. Many people have seen an altar brilliantly illuminated with tapers, others have perceived myriads of white doves, supposed to be angels, flying about, and these doves sometimes alight for the seers to take them up. They are tamer than earthly birds, and suffer themselves to be handled by the most devout amongst the spectators. But when the pious souls believe they have caught an angel they find they have only got a handful of moss, while the seers affirm that the doves have flown back to the Madonna. "The priests have seen nothing, nor ever will they be permitted to see," says the lame girl, "because they have no faith ;" and this accusation was vociferated from the rock more than once during my visit. The fact is undeniable—the priests merely perform the task of suggesting questions to the privileged children. Being asked whether epidemic, famine, or war would occur shortly, the apparition signalled a negative to the two first enquiries, and a decided affirmative to the last.

It would be too long a task to detail all the researches which have been made, and all the pains and trouble which have been expended to trace the authors of the pre-

sent excitement ; but we get a clue to the aim of all this turmoil from the fact that what the Madonna desires most is to have a church built at Erbrezzo, with a foundation of three masses a day, to be celebrated by three priests salaried from the money deposited by the pilgrims.

A few of the answers to the seers I have been able to collect ; they are interesting from their appropriate application to the feelings of many of the agitators who are now busily spreading their propaganda throughout Italy. "Next Easter will see the re-establishment of the temporal power of the Pope. All Protestants will be converted, and will become the most ardent champions of the Church of Rome. However, all reprobates and unbelievers will not be destroyed ; indeed they will even outnumber the saved among the just. At the present moment the just are so few that, even were they all to die, their loss would not be felt in the population of the world." Thousands of stories, more marvellous one than another, are related of the miraculous Virgin and the seers of Erbrezzo—and, as usual, no one dares to breathe a word against all this ignorance and superstition. The man who should dare to utter an ill-timed jest upon the subject would do so in peril of his life.

Is it hallucination ? Is it fraud ? Given the point that there is no apparition on the rock, one of these two deceptions must exist. Hallucination has often existed in past times—while the Archangel Gabriel appearing to the peasant Martin with a message for Louis Dixhuit, the Madonna at Rimini, and the Virgin of La Salette, are all of recent date. The "convulsionnaires" of St. Médard, who could submit to crucifixion without feeling pain, must have presented the same form of mental disturbance as that shown by the multitude gathered at Erbrezzo, barefooted and bareheaded amid the frozen snow.

The Government does not interfere with the manifestations, but it is feared that it will soon be necessary to punish what might have been prevented : the provocation to quarrel excited at Verona by refusal to bow the head or bend the knee at mention of the miracle might prove fatal at any moment. The Bishop of Verona, a wise and learned man, has used his most strenuous efforts to arrest the evil. He has lately issued a pastoral letter to the clergy of his diocese, commanding them to silence on the subject

of the apparition at Erbrezzo, but it is doubtful whether even this tacit denial of its reality will have any effect on the stolid and ignorant devotees who gather on the Holy Rock at Erbrezzo.

### STUDIES OF OVER THE WAY.

A HOUSE IN THE EUSTON ROAD.  
IN THREE PARTS. PART III.

"As soon as I was out of Sinclair's presence I knew there was not a moment to be lost. I felt I must see my brother at once. I determined to trust unreservedly to his counsels. Jack had detected Sinclair's influence over me before I had any suspicion of it myself, and now I began to hope that his strong common sense might devise for me a way of deliverance from the peril which yet threatened me. I found Jack in my lodgings, and at once told him everything. As soon as I had spoken my last word we set out for the Abbey, for it was plain that we must take Kate into our counsels at once. We met her in the garden, and we went all of us into a summer-house on the lawn, and then I told her the whole of my strange story.

"Kate was shocked, terribly shocked, when she knew all. Of course no suspicion of my guilt had ever crossed her mind. She knew not who the murderer might be. She was only sure that he was not her lover. After she had heard my story she was just as sure that he was the man who had all her life stood to her in the place of a father. Often, in the past, doubts as to Sinclair's character had arisen in her mind, but he had guarded his private life too closely to let them grow into anything more definite than doubts. Now Kate's eyes were opened. She had lived long enough with Sinclair to learn that he was a man of violent temper and ungovernable passions, and what I had just told her confirmed all her former suspicions and made it clear to her that he was unscrupulous enough to let no consideration of right or wrong, of life or death, stand between him and the accomplishment of his aims.

"The first definite proposal came from Jack. 'I don't much like the idea of amateur burglary, but you and I, Bob, must have an hour or so to ourselves in the library, just to see what those letters in that secret drawer are about.'

"'There will be no difficulty as to that,' said Kate. 'I will come down at one o'clock to-morrow morning and let you in

at the side door. It is no time for petty scruples. It is a game of life and death that we are playing.' This she said, pale and trembling, keeping back her tears with a brave effort.

"So it was decided. At one my brother and I stood by the little side door at the Abbey. I turned the handle, the door yielded, and there was Kate with a shaded candle in her hand. We followed her noiselessly into the library, and there she left us.

"The library was a strange old room, irregular in shape, full of angles and recesses. The ceiling was richly embossed in plaster, and divided into compartments by huge beams of oak, now warped and black with age. I went at once to the cabinet containing the secret drawer, and easily opened the spring by pressing the carved head. The drawer was half full of papers and other things. I handed it to Jack, and he, having emptied the contents into a basket, bore them to the farther end of the room, and proceeded to arrange them on the table.

"'Jack,' said I, 'you surely do not think of remaining. Put that drawer back into its place and let us be gone as quickly as we can. We run a very great risk by staying here. Why not examine the papers at home?'

"'Just for this reason,' answered Jack: 'if we take the papers away, we are common thieves and nothing else. We are at least housebreakers at present.'

"'But Jack,' I whispered, 'think what the consequences to Kate would be in case we should be discovered.'

"'Well, yes, it's only natural you should think about Kate, and we'll take care we are not discovered. You lock and fasten the door there, and I will undo this window. It opens down to the ground, so we can bolt easily in case we hear anything.'

"I saw at once that this proposal of Jack's diminished greatly the chances of surprise. After I had fastened the door, I replaced in its recess the secret drawer and closed the panel. Just as I did so I fancied I heard a faint sound overhead, and I paused in breathless anxiety to listen. All was still, however, still as the grave; and I rejoined Jack, who was by this time busy reading a letter which he had drawn at a venture from the basket. I took out another and was soon deep in its contents. The stillness of the place was intense, broken only by the ticking of the clock on the chimney-piece. The little circle of light in which

we sat, made the gloom of the deep recesses and distant corners all the more sombre and mysterious. We had not been reading many minutes when the sound of a light tap at the door and Kate's voice outside made us fly to open it. She came in and, with her face all terror-stricken, bade us go at once, as she had heard sounds in Sinclair's room as if he had been disturbed. Without a word we gathered up the papers and stole out into the garden. Kate silently made fast the casement, and when we looked back at the house from the other end of the drive, all signs of light had disappeared from the windows. There was neither sight nor sound to make us fear that our presence had been detected, so we made our way back to our lodgings as fast as we could.

"We read every word of the letters before we went to our beds. All apparently had been written by the same person, a man signing himself 'Bernard La Forge.' The earliest was dated some five years back and the last not more than five days. Read consecutively they told a story—a story sad enough, but all too common. They told us that the letter which Sinclair had dictated to me, which he had as he believed now in his safe keeping, described his own case to the life. There was a shameful secret which the writer of these letters had mastered, a secret which had become the bane and torment of Sinclair's existence. In the last letter the writer commanded Sinclair to meet him, the very night when the murder was done, under the great oak in the Park. In every letter there were demands for money, and threats of exposure in case of non-compliance on Sinclair's part. The tone of the letters written most recently was truculent and insulting, and must have tried severely the patience of a violent and quick-tempered man. It was all plain enough now. Driven to despair by the persecution of his tormentor, he had determined, cost what it might, to rid himself of his plague; and the discovery of his mesmeric influence over myself pointed out to him a method by which he might carry out his purpose with comparative impunity. 'We have not come to the end of the business yet,' said my brother as we sat over a late breakfast the next morning. 'We have convinced ourselves of Sinclair's guilt; but we have still to dispel the suspicions which hang around you. You had better keep altogether in the background, Bob. I must go and see the police authorities at once.'

"Jack rose to leave the room; but just at that moment Kate was ushered in by the landlady. We told her, in a few words, the result of our night's work. 'It must have been some imaginary noise which frightened me last night,' said Kate. 'After you went away the house was as still as the grave, and before I left the library I searched that part of the room where you had been sitting to make sure you had left nothing behind you in your hurry. Under the table I found this.'

"Kate drew from her pocket a small sheath covered with green leather, curiously figured and embossed. There was a sort of Arabesque tracery engraved on the brass rim round the top of it; but this pattern was abruptly broken off at the edge of the mounting.

"'I never saw this before,' said Kate, 'though I thought I knew all the curiosities and things of this sort in the house. It must have fallen out of the secret drawer unnoticed.'

"Jack took up the sheath and examined it carefully. 'It must be as Kate says,' he added. 'I do remember now that I heard something rattle when I emptied the drawer, and no doubt it was this. We overlooked it in our haste, but we must take care of it now. We should have been helpless altogether in this matter, Kate, without your assistance. Cheer up, Bob. I think the worst is over.'

"I was utterly worn out by the strain my nerves had undergone. I laid down and slept till late in the afternoon. The weather was terribly hot; but, when I woke, there was a cool breeze coming off the sea, and the fresh air tempted me out to walk a little along the beach. I walked a few hundred yards, but I found no relief for my heavy limbs and aching head. I felt sick and faint, and a sharp pain which shot suddenly through my side frightened me somewhat, and I resolved to see a doctor at once. I made my way with difficulty to the house of the principal practitioner in the place. I rang, and the servant who admitted me told me his master was not in for the moment, but that he would certainly be back very soon. He had been summoned suddenly about an hour ago to the Abbey, and had not yet returned.

"'To the Abbey!' I cried. 'Who is ill there? Tell me, did you hear to whom the doctor was called?'

"'The messenger mentioned no name, sir, when he came; but I heard soon after that it was for Mr. Sinclair, sir, who had



met with some accident. They say as how, sir, that he has tried to make away with himself; but I don't know how true it is.'

"I rushed away from the door back to my own rooms. The terrible news had taken away all sense of my own illness, of which I was so painfully conscious five minutes ago. As I reached the gate I saw Jack coming along the road, and I read at once upon his face the confirmation of the worst of what I had just heard.

"There is not much more to tell, and what there is I will set down in my brother's words as near as may be. 'I went at once to the superintendent of police,' said Jack, 'who was in consultation with a gentleman, apparently an official from Scotland Yard. I told them I had some information to give them with regard to the murder, upon which they both of them assumed an air of the most intense wisdom, as if to assure me that I was indeed presumptuous to attempt to enlighten them. They took out their pocket-books and sat with their pencils ready to jot down my statement; but I told them at once that, before I said a word, I wanted to see the knife with which the murder had been committed, and that I would also like to know the name of the murdered man, if they had made out what it was.

"They hummed and hesitated for some minutes, and wanted to know the reason of this request of mine, but finding me immovable, they gave way. The name of the victim was Bernard La Forge, and the knife did fit exactly the sheath Kate brought to us this morning. There could be no doubt about the correspondence between the two. When I thrust the dagger into the sheath a hidden spring closed upon it, and I had some trouble to get it out again. The Arabesque pattern traced upon the brazen rim of the sheath runs on to the hilt of the dagger, so that it seemed to be all one when the dagger was in its place. I left the sheath with the police, and told them I would return later in the evening, when I might be able to lay before them evidence connecting the antecedents of Bernard La Forge with some one in the neighbourhood they probably did not suspect, for I resolved I would take no further step till I had once more seen Sinclair. I found him in his library, and, difficult as it was, I felt I had better plunge at once into the matter. I always thought Sinclair did not like me, and now I fancied I could detect a look of malevolent triumph in his eye when I

began to talk about the purport of my visit.

"'Of course I see,' he began, 'how painful this must be to you, these reports connecting your brother with this miserable business. We cannot tell what turn affairs may take, but at present they look dark, very dark indeed.'

"'Oh, I am not come to apologise for my brother,' said I; 'I am——'

"'Ah, well. I see you decline to accept the situation, and of course I admire your loyalty; but now I will be frank with you. I dare say I ought to have told you before, but I have not known it long myself—Bob is very deep in the mire indeed. Certainly if I had known of it I should not have allowed him to pay his addresses to Kate. The fact of it is, this man who has been killed by somebody or other had some terrible hold over him. Men who are driven to the last extremity of despair do not, as a rule, neglect any opportunity of deliverance which chance throws in their way; and so I fear it has been with poor Bob.'

"'I could hardly contain myself while he was saying this. I was just about to interrupt him when he continued, "I suppose I may as well show you something now which will have to see the light before long." Here he unlocked an iron safe, and, taking out a letter, he was about to hand it to me when he checked himself, and drew the enclosure out of the envelope. As his eye fell upon it, the mocking leer faded from his face, giving place to a look of confused terror. As the sheet of paper fell from his hand to the ground I saw that it was blank. It was the one you put into the envelope, Bob, the day when he thought he had got your self-accusation safe under your own seal.

"'Sinclair recovered himself quickly; but his eyes flashed with the alarm he was trying to conquer and conceal. Then, as if suddenly recollecting himself, he said: "Ah, that is not the letter, I must have mislaid it, or perhaps it is here." He went into the recess where the cabinet containing the secret drawer was standing. I could not see him, but I could hear him press the spring, and let down the panel.

"'There was a confused noise, something heavy fell to the floor, and then a wild cry burst from his lips as he rushed back towards where I was sitting. "Gone!" he shouted; "and you know something of the theft, I see it in your looks. There were thieves then in the house last night when I heard that noise, and you were one of them. Now I see why you are so confident

about your brother's innocence ; but I'll be even with you yet."

"He moved towards me in a threatening manner. I rose from my seat and, keeping my eye firmly fixed upon him, I said, "I have very little to say to you, Sinclair. First, my brother, as you know well enough, is innocent. There is no need for me to tell you who the murderer is. Second, the police have in their possession a knife-case found in your library, which fits exactly the knife with which the murder was done, and it rests with me whether they will or will not know before night what reasons you may have had for wishing to get rid of Bernard La Forge."

"When he had heard this name, his face became yet more livid and terror-stricken ; his hand moved rapidly towards something on a side table. The next moment I saw it was a pistol. I had not a second to lose, I had just time to clutch his arm before he fired. The bullet passed close to my head and buried itself in the window-frame. The next minute Kate, followed by two servants, burst into the room ; and Sinclair, breaking from me, rushed through the open window into the garden.

"I was so much shocked by my narrow escape, that for a moment I hardly knew what was happening ; but the report of a pistol in the shrubbery recalled me to myself. I knew at once what it meant. I followed as quickly as I could, and as I crossed the lawn I saw one of the servants hurrying poor Kate, who seemed to be half fainting, into the house, and some others moving about amongst some laurels that fringed the flower garden. There Sinclair lay, shot through the head. Life was extinct when I reached the place, but of course I sent off for a doctor at once.

"This is all, Bob. You have escaped a terrible danger, but at a terrible price."

"My brother no doubt spoke in good earnest when he spoke of the terrible price. What would he have said if he had known the whole truth ? This, however, I felt I could never reveal, and as the days went by the burthen of my secret became intolerable. Every moment I found myself face to face with the frightful contingency that I might be a murderer in deed though not in will. I used to sit by the hour together gazing at my right hand in search of the 'damned spot,' till one day it broke out terribly true before my agonised eyesight. See, sir, and judge for yourself whether I am the subject of a delusion."

The young man held out before him his right hand.

"See, there it is !" he went on, pointing with his finger to the middle of the palm, "there is the evidence of my woe !"

To my eyes the young man's hand was as spotless as my own ; but I could tell from the look of strained anxiety in his eyes as he sat gazing at it, that the spot of blood had a terrible reality for him. I rose from my seat, and thanking him for the confidence he had shown by putting me in possession of his strange history, I left the room.

Never again did I see his pale face at the window over the way, and a few days afterwards a card in a window proclaimed the fact that the rooms were to let.

## VICTIMS.

By THEO GIFT.

*Author of "Lil Lorimer," "An Alibi and its Price," Etc., Etc.*

### CHAPTER XIII.—MARSTLAND WRITES A LONG LETTER.

It was evening just a week later, and Leah was sitting alone in the drawing-room at home ; sitting doing nothing too, which, with her, was a very rare occurrence. Downstairs in his study the Professor was giving a lesson in practical chemistry to a private pupil, while Mrs. Josephs was occupying herself with poulticing little David, who, having come home from school that afternoon with a sore throat, had been despatched to bed early to be doctored.

In the drawing-room the lamp was lit, and the French windows stood open, letting in a cool breeze from the little garden at the back, where, in the daytime, tall hollyhocks, both red and white, gold-disked sunflowers, and homely marigolds and nasturtiums made a bright look-out even in these waning summer days. Only a few evenings ago, George Marstland and Vera had paced those narrow garden-paths with lingering happy steps, pausing now and then to throw a merry word at Leah, who, having given them her companionship as an excuse for coming out, took pains to prevent its being burdensome to them by devoting herself immediately to a war which she declared it was necessary to wage, day after day, with those enemies of her sunflowers, the slugs.

Now, however, the lovers were gone and the slugs allowed to feast on the sunflowers at their will, while Leah sat alone beside a little table covered with a half-written and

much-blotted score of music, not doing anything, only thinking.

Thinking! But with a face so much sadder and graver than that of the brilliant girl who had sat on the sea-shore in Brittany only two months ago, that two, if not five, years might have passed over her head since then.

Yet had anything happened to her in the interim? Nothing at all to speak of; nothing, except that the friend with whom she was then staying had since come to stay with her; and that another friend, one as to whom she had been wont in days past to wax indignant if frivolous folks spoke of him as her lover or admirer, had effectually saved her from the need of such indignation in the future by proclaiming himself the admirer and lover of the other girl. "Vera's lover!" Even now Leah could hardly comprehend it; hardly bring her mind to realise her little Bretonne friend in the character of "Marstland's wife." And yet if the old St. Laurents could be brought to consent, that was what Vera would be, perhaps the very next time she saw her, and what Marstland, after knowing her one short fortnight, declared that he desired nothing so ardently as to make her.

A fortnight! Only that; and he had known Leah herself intimately for over eight years. Her own brothers were not better understood by her than he; while, as for his sister, Lady Hessey, she had never read with him, felt with him, worked with and for him in London slums and thrown herself into his aims and affairs generally as Leah had done; ay, done ever since she was an enthusiastic girl of seventeen, and he an energetic youth with unusually high aims and philanthropic purposes, a year older.

Perhaps it was because of the very length of that intimacy, that familiar fraternal bond, that the idea of any nearer or dearer one had never come into his mind; but then no one else had aroused it either. He had never even seemed to care enough for any other girl to teach Leah by the tiniest twinge of jealousy how deep her feeling for him really went; and now that Vera—poor little childish Vera, aimless and idealless as the daisies in her father's orchards—should be the one to win him, seemed to her a thing as impossible to realise as that of which the poet once sang in bitter wonder:

Having known me to decline  
On a range of lower feelings and a narrower heart  
than mine.

Yet, even as the quotation forced itself into Leah's mind, she felt that she was blushing furiously for very shame of the pride which prompted it. Who was she, she asked herself, to decide that poor Vera's heart was narrower, because her feelings found their expression on a lower grade than her own? Had not she herself found the Bretonne girl both lovable and loving in an eminent degree? Was she not kind, gentle, docile—all that men most love in their wives, a creature born

Her babes to worship and her lord to praise.

And could Leah say as much for herself? Her "lord" would assuredly get as much blame as praise if he deserved it; while as for baby worship, she had had too much to do in a practical way for the little beings about her—from her own younger brothers to Naomi's children and those of several poor Jewish mothers in her neighbourhood—too many little jackets to mend and socks to darn; too many nights made sleepless by the fretful wails which, because they arose from sickness, she could only soothe by patience and tenderness; to have room for looking on children as mere angels of poetry and light, brought into the world to be praised and worshipped, told stories to, and fed on sugar-plums.

"Vera's children will be well spoilt if they are not well cared for," Leah thought grimly, for with the recollection of her friend's devotion to Naomi's babes, there came to her a sudden unkindly one of the girl's helplessness in the event of anything being amiss with them, and of her once putting back the baby in its cradle because it screamed violently while she was dandling it, and leaving it alone there, fairly running away, instead of looking to see what ailed the little creature, and if she could remedy it. Leah also called to mind the readiness with which Vera had left her father and mother during the former's dangerous illness; though Leah had previously looked on her as a pattern of filial duty, as regarded the mother at any rate. "But then, George Marstland thought her love for me more beautiful than anything that women in general feel for one another," the Jewish girl went on with a faint, bitter smile, "and so did I too; yet that love never once, I think, suggested to her that it might possibly be a little painful to me to find myself suddenly playing second fiddle where I had before played first, even in her affections, let alone his; never once led her to spare me a confidence as to his sayings and feelings when he was absent,

or to feign a momentary preference for my company in his presence. Is her love for him of a more active nature, I wonder? Will it make her as curiously obtuse to his feelings, as helpless in his troubles, as ready to leave him at the least temptation? Will she ever satisfy him, and not make him feel he has thrown himself away in—"

But Leah's wonderings got no further. With a sudden revulsion of feeling she stopped short and stood up, her colour changing rapidly, her full, flexible lips eloquent of a noble scorn.

"Oh!" she said aloud, and with an almost despairing gesture, "what am I thinking? What am I coming to? Isn't it bad enough to—to care for a man who doesn't care for me, bad enough to envy my own friend the good fortune Heaven has been pleased to send her, but I must become so mean, so abominably mean and despicable, as to begin to pick holes in her immediately, to underrate her good qualities and try to find bad ones? A fine contrast I am to her, indeed, that I should think it necessary to pity him for having left me and 'thrown himself away on' her! Oh, what miserably petty creatures we women are! A man is always 'thrown away' when he cares for some other woman instead of our precious selves; and, after all, what is George Marstland himself, that I must needs trouble myself so immensely about his choice of a wife? Isn't a pure-minded, gentle, innocent girl like Vera, good enough for any man, him included; or is he so wonderfully better than the rest of the world that he must needs—? No, no, though," checking herself again with a hotter blush and a little stamp, "that's humbug, and I won't try it even with myself. Whether he's better or not than others in reality, he is better to me, better than any other I have ever met or shall meet; and I know it—I'll be honest whatever else I am—know it as well as I know I used to think I was better to him than other girl! Well, that was my mistake," and here the tears welled slowly up into her dark eyes and softened all her face, "and a mistake like that is a misfortune; but it needn't be a shame and degradation too, unless I choose to make it so. It needn't unfit me to be her friend still, and his, as it would if I were to give way to these vile thoughts of spite and envy. That friendship with him has always been one of the best things in my life. Why can't I let it be so still, and rest contented with it? I may, unless

I let myself sink as low as I have done to-night; and that I'll never do again, though she were to absorb him so that he ceased to care for me altogether."

Nor did she look like it as she stood there with her hands clasped, her head erect, and her eyes shining. The battle had been fought and won—a hard battle and a bitter one; for she did love this man, and that he should love, not her, but her friend, cut her to the heart. But, however she might accuse herself, there was nothing either low or mean in Leah Josephs' nature; and the same clear-eyed honesty which made her confess her own weakness, showed her also that there was nothing but common maidenliness and resolution, nothing either heroic or self-sacrificing in the effort needful for crushing it. Perhaps, had it been otherwise, the effort might have been easier; magnanimity and generosity being such far finer and more comfortable virtues when we feel ourselves, and know others are feeling, that we have been so hardly used as to make the exercise of them specially grand and noble. Nay, it had been much more easy for Leah to put herself on one side, and only stand forward as the warm and enthusiastic champion of the lovers at Rose Villa—where Naomi (who had quite made up her mind that Marstland was to be her brother-in-law, and in that capacity to sip the sacred wine, and bow his head to the congratulatory "Mozeltoff!"\* at Leah's side) was disposed to be snappish and unsympathetic with the non-fulfilment of her expectations. Here, at home, all the interest and sympathy were reserved for the betrothed couple, and Leah was not only expected to feel even more pleasurable excitement than the rest in the fulfilment of their hopes, but to be able to keep up the family spirits generally in the natural flatness and monotony following on their joint departure.

To her, however, the flatness had seemed worse than to the others. She had been just long enough from home to have got a little "out of" the routine there. She had been just long enough mixed up with other and foreign interests to be unable to realise that her part in them was only that of a temporary onlooker; while, on the other hand, the old routine was so identified with the constant presence or proximity of Marstland, and with their mutual plans,

\* "May it turn out happily!" spoken by the witnesses at a Jewish wedding.



sympathies, and labours, that the first awakening to the fact that she must regulate her own life now apart from these, had seemed for a time to take all the savour of it from her.

For a time only! At worst the "black dog" had crouched upon her shoulders for five days. Now at last she had found courage to face, wrestle with, and fling it off; and as if to signalise or test her little victory, there came, almost in the same moment, a sound for which she had been watching—the postman's knock and the rustle of something thick being squeezed into the little letter-box. In an instant Leah was in the hall and back again, holding in her hand two letters, both for her, and both bearing the stamp of the French Republic; but at one she hardly looked. That could wait. It was only in Madame St. Laurent's feeble pin-pointed handwriting. The other—a portentously bulky one—was from Marstrand, and with the heartfelt exclamation, "Oh, I hope it is all settled, and that they are to be made happy!" she tore it open.

It was headed, "Hôtel des Etrangers, Quimper," and was as follows:

"MY DEAR LEAH,—I shall be in London soon after you get this; but as some stories are less pleasant to tell than write, I may as well let you know the upshot of my journey by letter, especially as, despite all your friendship for Vera, I think it doubtful, as things are, whether she may even be allowed to write to you.

"I had a quick voyage to St. Malo, and landed in France twenty-four hours after our poor little darling, being determined not to leave her longer than I could help to the task of smoothing down her unpleasant old parents single-handed. Indeed, I had calculated for her beforehand the time of my probable arrival both at St. Malo and Pont l'Abbé, so that, though I could not telegraph to her, 'I am here,' she might feel sure of the fact and happier for the assurance. Perhaps you'll call this abominably conceited; but why should I pretend not to know that Vera loves me, because I wonder just as much as you at her goodness in doing so? One may be certain even of the most wonderful things in creation, yet the certainty need not lessen the wonder—rather, I think, it increases it.

"It was evening before I got to Pont l'Abbé, and having had no food since an early breakfast, I was ravenous enough to eat mine host of the inn where, at your

recommendation, I put up; but the knowledge that there were only five miles between me and the lady of my heart drove out every other thought but her for the time being; and before doing anything else I wrote a note to M. St. Laurent, soliciting the honour of an interview with him on the morrow, and despatched it to Les Châtaigniers by a messenger, who assured me in barbarously unintelligible Breton-French that he would be there and back in the crack of a whip. It must have been a long whip to crack, for he was not back under three good hours at least, time enough for me to have dined and rested, and even enjoyed a twilight ramble through the quaint dead-alive little town, which brought pleasant thoughts of you and your sketches at every turn; but he came at last, and when I saw the note in his hand I forgave him.

"It was from monsieur, very short, and wearing the air of having been written in a rage; for he began by deprecating indignantly my persistence in having come over to Brittany at all after the definite answer he had already given to my proposals; but went on to say that as I had done so he would not be discourteous enough to absolutely refuse me an interview, provided that I had the folly to insist on what could only result in a repetition of his previous reply; and he named eleven in the morning. That was enough for me, however. I was outside the gates of Les Châtaigniers by ten, and for an hour I paced to and fro along the very dustiest road imaginable, keeping my eyes fixed on the house which held my treasure like a miser on his money casket, till the moment when I might go up and put forward my claims to it.

"Well, I put it forward, and without success. It wasn't a pleasant interview. Monsieur received me alone, and a more beetle-browed, bilious-eyed specimen of a French gentleman I never saw. Perhaps he had not yet recovered from his late illness; at any rate, if I had not wanted to marry Vera before, I think I should do so now if only to rescue her from such a father. At first he didn't want to hear me at all, but simply to renew his refusal, and dismiss me; but I had determined on two things—that he should listen, and I would keep my temper. And when he found that I persisted first of all in showing him that, as an Englishman, I had only acted according to English customs in speaking to the young lady first, and had

not lost a moment afterwards in writing to him for his consent, he was obliged to modify his bearing a little and withdraw that word 'lâche,' which had been rankling in me ever since it was uttered. All the same, his answer was 'No.' And when I asked for some reason, trotted out my family tree, and enquired somewhat haughtily if he considered my position in any way inferior to his own—we Marstlands are rather proud of that same tree, you must know—the old man shrugged his shoulders, and observed icily that he had nothing to say to that. Doubtless monsieur was of a family excellently respectable, although it was nevertheless true that, all things else being equal, his highest ambition had not perhaps centred in seeing his daughter the wife of 'un petit médecin.'

"I swallowed even that affront, and asked if he objected to my profession, for if so, I was ready to give it up. . . . Leah, don't despise me. I'm glad he didn't take me at my word, but at that moment I'd have given up everything for Vera. . . . And looking round the shabbily furnished room and mildewed walls, I mentioned the amount of my private income, and that I was prepared to settle it all on his daughter and ask no 'dot' with her; adding that I believed I could give her a home with which she, at any rate, would be fully content. This, however, only seemed to exasperate M. St. Laurent still more. He begged that I would not affront him by alluding to the momentary and deplorable folly of which the young lady in question had been guilty in listening to my pretensions, and craved my pardon for informing me that, whatever opinion I might have of them, he, as her father and the legal disposer of her hand, had entirely different views for her, views which were by no means of recent arrangement, and which were not likely to be altered by any fresh proposals, no matter from whom proceeding.

"This was startling, and I asked, perhaps too abruptly, what the 'views' he alluded to were. Monsieur bowed with more politeness than before, and begged, 'with all humility,' that I would excuse him for declining to discuss family matters of a private nature with a stranger.

"Might I at least enquire if his daughter knew of the views in question?

"She did.

"And did she concur in them?

"The question, he said, was, with all

due deference to me, an impertinence, seeing that a French demoiselle of good breeding and family always concurred in the views of her parents. Mdle. St. Laurent might have been temporarily misled by the intrigues of an ungrateful protégée, but was no exception to the rule. This rasped me, and I told him bluntly that if he alluded to the young lady with whom his daughter had been staying of late, her friendship was as much an honour to Mdle. St. Laurent as the latter's was to her; further, that, as I knew of my own knowledge that Vera was neither aware of, nor consenting to, the arrangements he had mentioned when I last saw her, three days previously, I absolutely declined to believe that she had adopted them in the interim, unless I was informed of the fact from her own lips.

"This led to a regular battle, he having made up his mind not to allow a meeting between us, and it was only when he found that I was absolutely not to be got rid of on any other terms that he gave in, and muttering that I would only have the mortification of hearing my dismissal from the young lady herself, left the room. He returned in about five minutes—I believe it was only that, but it seemed an hour to me—followed by a female in black silk, whom at the first glance I took to be the maid I saw at your house, but who turned out to be Madame St. Laurent herself, and with her, Vera, clinging to her arm and looking—poor child! it makes my blood boil now to think of it—so crushed, pale, and swollen-eyed, that I think even you would scarcely have recognised her. At the sight of me standing there, however, the colour rushed into her face, she dropped her mother's arm and made a start forward with a kind of inarticulate exclamation; but in the same moment her father came between us, and addressing her in an even harsher voice than he had used to me, said that he was sorry to expose her to a mortification which was no doubt painful, but that it was not of his choosing. She must for it blame the man who had too little delicacy to spare her the shame of avowing before him her regret for the folly which had induced her to forget both propriety and her duty as a daughter, and to listen to his addresses for a moment. Poor little Vera's colour changed from crimson to white half a dozen times during this speech, as you may well imagine, and she shrank back against her mother, looking so utterly ashamed and miserable that I could not

bear it, and coming forward exclaimed in English—hitherto the whole talk had been in French :

“No, Vera, that is not the truth. I came here to-day to ask your father for your hand, as we agreed I should. He has refused it to me, telling me that he has other views for you, of which you are aware, and for which you are willing to give me up ; and what I answer him is that I will not believe it unless you tell me so with your own lips. I don't believe it. I have not known you long, love, it is true, but I think I know you too well to believe that you have ceased to love me so soon, unless indeed you were mistaken in thinking you loved me at all. If you can tell me so—”

“Tell him then, *ma fille*,” broke in the old man angrily, ‘tell him that you were mistaken ; that you were led away by the designing friends who took advantage of your youth and inexperience ; and that now you are back in your own home and under the protection of your father and mother you are deeply sorry for the weakness into which you were betrayed.’ And thus prompted, Vera, who had grown paler with every word he uttered, looked piteously at me and stammered out :

“I—am sorry. I—I did not mean—did not know. Please forgive me. I—” And with that she broke down into sudden helpless weeping, and before I could even get to her, touch her hand, or utter more than her name, her mother, who had stood with one arm round her all the time, whipped her quickly out of the room near which they had remained ; and Monsieur, throwing open the other, said to me :

“There, sir ; you have humiliated us enough ! You have had your answer, and you have witnessed the shame and distress which the mere sight of you occasions in the breast of the young lady upon whom you would have forced your unauthorised pretensions. I—her father—have permitted this most unwillingly, in order to satisfy you ; and I now desire that you will leave my house and make no further attempt to intrude yourself on any member of it.’ He rang the bell as he spoke, and bowing very slightly, left the room without even waiting for me to answer. Perhaps it was as well. I had been very near knocking him down more than once, and I don't know that that would have helped matters. As it was, I had no resource but to leave, and I did so.

“I returned to Pont l'Abbé, paid my

bill at the hotel, told the landlord I had finished my business, and was going back to England forthwith, and departed by the next train. I did this because I saw plainly that any attempt to see Vera again, or communicate with her openly, would not be permitted by her parents, while, as it was utterly impossible for me on the other hand to leave Brittany without at least coming to an understanding as to her real feelings in the matter, and our position towards one another, I did not wish to give M. St. Laurent an opening for frustrating my intentions by allowing him to suspect that I was still lingering in the neighbourhood. That is why I have come here, but now that I am here, I see no more clearly than before how I am to communicate with my poor little sweetheart, whose miserable face seems to pursue me everywhere, and tell me what I am convinced only fear kept her lips from repeating, that she cares for me as much now as in those blissful hours which seem so far away, though the thought of them will ever make your pleasant parlour and garden seem like sacred places to me. If she does, be sure nothing under heaven will ever induce me to give her up. It will then be simply a case of waiting till she is of age to be her own mistress and choose for herself ; but I must ascertain this, and I have only two days to do it in, as I promised Dr. Hunter to be back at my duties on Friday at latest. In the meantime my one hope is that Vera may have written to you, in which case I am sure you will telegraph to me at once. That is why I am writing to you now, and if I have bored you unutterably—which I don't believe, for I know the extent of your patience and sympathy where those whom you allow to call themselves your friends are concerned—I expect you to forgive me nevertheless, for the reason that I owe the knowledge of my love to you, and that I verily believe her love for you is no whit less true and deep than it is for

“Your sincere and grateful Friend,

“GEORGE MARSTLAND.

“P.S.—Pray telegraph at once if you have heard. At present I don't know what to do, and am as miserable, restless, and impatient as it is possible to be.”

“So it would appear,” said the Professor drily. He had come into the room while Leah was absorbed in her letter, and, taking up the page she had finished with a word of enquiry, had sat down in the

arm-chair she vacated for him, and proceeded to read it from beginning to end, keeping one hand on his daughter's shoulder the while; but making no comments till he had finished.

"And what is the other letter?" he asked then. "The fair Dulcinea's, I suppose, as I see it hails from France also, and looks portentously thick. My poor Leah!"

"No, it is from Madame," said Leah quickly, but without lifting her face, which various causes had helped to flush a deeper crimson than she cared to make apparent during the reading of Marstland's letter; but the crimson became still more vivid as she opened this second epistle, and saw that the first thing to drop out was one from herself to Vera unopened, and that this was accompanied by a brief discourteous note from M<sup>de</sup>. St. Laurent, saying that, as she did not intend to permit any further acquaintance between her daughter and the young person who had so treacherously abused the trust reposed in her, she returned the letter addressed by the latter to M<sup>lle</sup>. St. Laurent, and begged that with it all correspondence with Les Châtaigniers would come to an end. Further, she enclosed a cheque for twelve pounds, for M<sup>lle</sup>. St. Laurent's board and lodging for six weeks.

"Oh, father!" cried Leah indignantly, and with a quick movement of her hand, as if to crumple the paper. The old botanist smiled.

"Give it to me, my dear," he said; and tearing the cheque very neatly into four pieces, he wrote on a sheet of paper: "With Prof. Joseph's compliments," and enclosed it, with the fragments, in an envelope addressed to Madame St. Laurent, adding, as he fastened it up:

"And so closes a rather unpleasant page in your youthful adventures, Leah, child. For the future we'll not let you run about to foreign parts in search of friends, but keep to home-brewed ones."

"It—it wasn't in search of friends, father," said Leah, very low. Mortification and a mingling of other feelings had brimmed her eyes too full to risk lifting them.

"No, it was to give your old dad a trip to the British Association, and now he wishes he had never gone."

"Ah, father, no! don't say that!" cried Leah, flashing a reproachful look at him. "As if that woman's impertinence mattered to that extent! It can't hurt us, and I shall certainly not desert Vera for it, poor girl!"

"Unfortunately that isn't for you to choose, my dear. Her parents have the right to decide who her acquaintances shall or shall not be, and have done so by putting you out of the list. You have no option in the matter."

"But, father, poor little Vera! And when you see what George Marstland says of her broken-hearted look! And I promised him—I promised them both——"

"My dear, George Marstland is an impetuous young fellow with a bad attack of love sickness, which he will work off all the better for not being too much coddled in it. I am glad he has got to work at his profession. Fancy talking of giving it up for a little girl he has barely known for three weeks! Why, upon my word, if he were a son of mine I'd have taken my stick to him for even uttering such folly. Just look at all this waste of good paper, too! How many sheets are there? Seven! Good Lord! But, there, 'tis a sort of fever that all boys go through now and again, and we'll excuse it this once. I shall tell him when he comes back, however, that he must just put all his sentimentality in his pocket till he has got a wife to expend it on, or work it off as a man should. I'm a selfish old father myself, and I value my women-folks' bright faces too highly to let them be turned into rain-clouds because another selfish old father chooses to keep his women-folk to himself. Sensible man too! I'd like young Marstland to see the sort of face I'd welcome any young fellow with who wanted to carry you off just now, when I've got a nice hour's leisure for listening to that article of Grant Allen's, and mounting some microscopical slides. Come down to the den, child, and put Brittany out of your head."

And Leah made haste to obey, assuming indeed rather extra cheerfulness as she did so. Something—some indefinable tone of half-wistful tenderness in her father's words had startled her with the fear that he had guessed her secret; and she dared not make any further plea for Marstland or Vera just then.

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